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Conference Abstract

# BHL and the Pandemic: An accelerator of digital advances and transformation

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## Abstract

Committed to the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) since 2016, the National Natural History Museum (MNHN) library encountered opportunities and new challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The origins of MNHN date back to 1635, with the foundation of a royal garden for medicinal and teaching purposes, by King Louis XIII. It became the National Natural History Museum in 1793 during the French Revolution.

The MNHN collections today include about seventy million specimens. These collections constitute a global archive and a major research infrastructure. Being a very important center of research and teaching, the institution groups together several entities at thirteen different locations. It is deeply committed to preserving biodiversity and to sharing knowledge with the public through its galleries, botanical gardens, zoos and libraries.

The library, consisting of a main library and several specialized libraries, is one of the world's largest natural history libraries. The collection contains more than two million documents of all kinds: printed and electronic books and periodicals; manuscripts and archives; maps, drawings, photographs and art collections. The library takes part in the French higher education libraries network and is associated with the French national library, which offers many opportunities for collaboration at a national level.

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The MNHN library launched its first digitization program twenty years ago, beginning with the academic publications the MNHN has been releasing since 1802 and including the publications of the related learned societies. A second program devoted to taxonomic documentation began in 2014. It is a research-driven digitization program built in collaboration with the MNHN researchers. A third program shares the treasures of the library, e.g., precious books, manuscripts and archives; iconography (such as the famous velum collection), scientific objects or artworks. The MNHN digital library is harvested by Gallica, the digital library of the French national library.

After participating in the BHL-Europe project from 2009 to 2012, the MNHN library became a BHL Member in 2016 and started uploading content in September 2017. The complete collection of MNHN academic publications from 1802 to 2000 is now available on BHL. The publications of the learned societies related to the MNHN are to be the library's next contribution.

During the first lockdown, from March to May 2020, librarians in charge of content uploading to BHL were able to pursue this task full-time, which increased the production. The last BHL-Europe files were loaded during this period of time. More than 100,000 pages were added in 2020. As the production increased, so did the museum's outreach in 2020, by more than 70%, both in number of visitors and in number of pages viewed. It seems that the MNHN library is now better identified as the French access point to BHL, both by learned societies and by researchers who ask for information or for help.

But beyond an increased production and a better outreach, the pandemic also provided new tasks for remote workers. The first lockdown was a very difficult time, especially for people who had no remote work and felt deprived of their professional identity. So progressively new tasks were established for people for whom no remote tasks were yet defined. Among these new activities, a workflow for the creation of article-level metadata was set up with the help of Roderic Page (University of Glasgow, Scotland). Thanks to this work, users can easily search and browse individual articles within several MNHN publications, such as *Adansonia*.

The pandemic turned out to be an accelerator of digital awareness and transformation, not only at the management level, but more widely for the whole library staff as well. By providing new remote tasks, BHL reduced inequalities within the library team and offered new opportunities. This greater involvement also strengthened the sense of belonging to BHL, which is definitely not only a resource but also a community, helping us get through this difficult period.

Our goal now is to continue to perpetuate these projects. The MNHN library also intends to capitalize on all this work in its own digital library, by assigning digital object identifiers (DOI). This work on articles is indeed a driver for the evolution of the information systems. The Museum is currently redesigning its whole IT infrastructure for collections, helping the library be part of a larger movement. The objectives of this new system are to better connect library collections and naturalist collections and to face the challenge of

interoperability in the European and international ecosystem in which the MNHN and BHL participates.

## Keywords

remote activities, article-level metadata, equity

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